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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming**

Summary

The report responds to the mandates given to the Secretary-General by the 2005 World Summit to take further steps in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the policies and decisions of the Organization. In response to those mandates, the Secretary-General requested all United Nations entities to review and strengthen their gender-mainstreaming programmes with a view to developing a system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming with related accountability mechanisms, and undertook to submit a report to the 2006 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council containing a summary of progress made so far and further steps to be taken.

The report provides a summary of progress made so far in the joint efforts of the United Nations system to develop the system-wide policy and strategy for gender mainstreaming, including consultations, through the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the High Level Committees on Programme and on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

As a result, a number of broad principles and practical elements based on intergovernmental mandates have been established and will be further concretized and operationalized through a system-wide survey of capacity of the United Nations system on gender mainstreaming. They will be further refined in light of findings of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence.

* E/2006/100.

** The submission of the present report was delayed because of the need for further consultations.

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I. Introduction

1. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to fully and effectively implement the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly as an essential contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. They recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality and undertook to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, and to strengthen the capabilities of the United Nations system in the area of gender. In addition, global leaders called upon the Secretary-General and all decision-making bodies to take further steps in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the policies and decisions of the Organization.[1]

2. In response to the above-mentioned mandates, the Secretary-General, in his report to the General Assembly on the implementation of decisions in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, requested all United Nations entities to review and strengthen their gender-mainstreaming programmes with a view to developing a system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming with related accountability mechanisms.[2] The Secretary-General undertook to submit the present report to the Economic and Social Council at its 2006 substantive session to provide Member States with a summary of progress made so far and further steps in view of the guidance of the Summit. To coordinate these activities, the Secretary-General designated his Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to work in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, departments, funds and programmes to develop such a United Nations system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming.

3. The present report responds to the above-mentioned mandates by providing a summary of progress made so far in the joint efforts of the United Nations system to develop the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming. A report on progress made in mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations, with a focus on training activities, as requested in paragraph 10 of resolution 2005/31, is issued as a separate document (E/2006/65).

II. Progress in the preparation of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming

4. In his letter of 16 January 2006 to all heads of United Nations entities, the Secretary-General outlined general requirements for the development of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming. The policy and strategy should respond to intergovernmental mandates, including decisions of the General Assembly, primarily the 2005 World Summit Outcome, and relevant resolutions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council. In developing the policy and strategy, the High Level Committees of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination should work in cooperation with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality.

5. As part of those inter-agency consultations, in February 2006, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality discussed what should constitute the key elements of a United Nations system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming. It agreed that a common policy would enhance coherence and coordination among United Nations entities, increase ownership and accountability for implementation of gender mainstreaming particularly at the senior management and country levels. It would also build synergy from various mandates and sectors where United Nations entities are active, and link programme strategies at the country level with monitoring and reporting mechanisms at the intergovernmental level. In the light of those considerations, the Network decided on a number of broad principles and practical elements for the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming.

6. In April 2006, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women briefed the two High Level Committees on Programme and on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the outcome of the Inter-Agency Network meeting. She presented the elements of the policy and strategy elicited from the discussion of the meeting. Both committees endorsed the proposed elements of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming.

7. The Chief Executives Board for Coordination will discuss both the system-wide policy and strategy at its session in the fall of 2006.

III. Policy framework

8. The development of a system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming is in line with the intergovernmental mandates set forth by Member States on gender equality and empowerment of women. In the 1995 Beijing Declaration, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women committed themselves to "implement the following Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes".[3]

9. The Economic and Social Council adopted agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system at its coordination segment on 18 July 1997.[4] In the agreed conclusions the Council defined gender mainstreaming as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality".

10. The importance of integrating a gender perspective to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, was reiterated by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-ninth session during its review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (see Economic and Social Council decision 2005/232, Declaration, para. 3).

11. Other elements of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming are based on paragraph 4 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/31, in which the Council called upon all United Nations entities to develop action plans with timelines, clear guidelines on the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming and specific provisions on institutional mechanisms at both headquarters and in the field; to incorporate gender perspectives in programme budgets and all results-budgeted processes; to ensure continuous awareness raising and training; to build capacity of staff to undertake gender analysis and apply it; to ensure strong commitment by senior management staff to gender mainstreaming; to strengthen accountability systems for all staff; to incorporate a gender perspective into operational mechanisms in accordance with the national development strategies; to support Governments and civil society; and to develop and institutionalize monitoring and evaluation tools and methodologies, and promote the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into national development policies and programmes.

12. Finally, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, global leaders called for a stronger system-wide coherence for inter-agency policy frameworks. The development of the system-wide policy and strategy for a more effective gender mainstreaming will be guided by the following measures as outlined in the Summit Outcome:

(a) Strengthening linkages between the normative work of the United Nations system and its operational activities;

(b) Pursuing a coherent policy in assigning mandates and allocating resources throughout the system;

(c) Ensuring that the main horizontal themes such as sustainable development, human rights and gender are taken into account in decision-making throughout the system;

(d) Implementing current reforms aimed at a more effective, efficient, coherent, coordinated and better performing UN country presence with a strengthened role for the senior resident official.[7]

IV. Key challenges

13. The discussion of a system-wide strategy and policy comes at a time when the United Nations is in a period of transition characterized by fundamental changes in its major policies and approaches that will impact the delivery of projects and programmes in support of Governments. Although this period of transition is a challenging one, it also provides an opportunity to introduce changes in the way United Nations entities mainstream a gender perspective into their programmes and policies — changes that will ultimately strengthen prospects for achieving gender equality.

14. The 10-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action showed that significant progress has been made by the United Nations system in gender mainstreaming since the Beijing Conference (see E/2004/59). Most entities developed policies using gender mainstreaming as a strategy for achieving gender equality goals. Others are currently in the process of developing such policies. In many entities, gender-mainstreaming policies are

supported by institutional structures involving dedicated resources, including gender units, focal points, and capacity-building approaches. A number of United Nations entities made efforts to develop an organizational culture supportive of gender mainstreaming, including defining roles, responsibilities of staff and, in particular, of managers at all levels. In many organizations, tools and methodologies for gender mainstreaming have been developed.

15. Despite those gains, the systematic, practical application of gender mainstreaming by United Nations entities remains a challenge. The gap between policy and implementation is particularly significant in such sectors as poverty eradication, health care, particularly maternal health and HIV/AIDS, girls' education, macroeconomic development, employment, energy, sanitation, infrastructure, social protection, rural development and women and peace. There is often insufficient accountability and low capacity for gender mainstreaming, including a significant knowledge gap resulting in limited awareness and understanding of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality. Successful gender mainstreaming also requires entities to ensure that all categories of staff take responsibility and are held accountable for integrating gender perspectives into their areas of work.

16. Not all entities have systematically paid attention to gender perspectives in their programme budgets and used the opportunities provided by results-based budgeting. While some United Nations entities reported an increase in resources for gender mainstreaming since 1997, others saw their resources for that purpose decrease as part of overall budget cuts. Most United Nations entities also face difficulties in measuring progress in gender mainstreaming as well as in monitoring and reporting it. At the country level, challenges also include insufficient attention to gender perspectives in operational processes, including the common country assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals. It is essential that the information obtained in monitoring and evaluation processes is taken into account when developing policies and programmes and that institutional mechanisms are adjusted to ensure effective gender mainstreaming.

17. As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Mandating and delivering: analysis and recommendations to facilitate the review of mandates", there is a need to strengthen the internal institutional mechanisms put in place, such as capacity-building, methodologies, and tools, the impact on activities and outcomes, the commitment at the policy and management levels and human and financial resources allocated. There is also a need to close the gaps in coherence, collaboration and coordination of the work of the United Nations on gender issues, building on the work of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, the Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group.[6] The Executive Committees on Peace and Security, Humanitarian Affairs and Economic and Social Affairs should be added to that list. In the same report the Secretary-General requested the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence to include in its work an assessment of how gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming, could be better and more fully addressed in the work of the United Nations.[7] The Secretary-General considers this to be a key mission of the Panel and looks forward to the results.

V. Purpose of the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming

18. The purpose of the United Nations system-wide policy is to promote gender equality and empowerment of women with emphasis on the implementation, particularly at the country level, through a coordinated and integrated United Nations response. Each United Nations entity would build on its comparative advantages and mandates in order to ensure the highest possible impact and cost effectiveness. The policy would be supported by an actionable system-wide strategy on gender mainstreaming with clear benchmarks and timelines. The strategy would include the necessary interventions or actions that provide a systematic approach to the achievement of gender equality.

19. A system-wide statement on gender equality and mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations system was adopted in March 1998 by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the predecessor of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.[8] In the statement, heads of United Nations entities pledged to mainstream a gender perspective into all their institutions, policies, and programmes. The statement was not supported, however, by sufficiently strong institutional and policy measures to ensure that it was implemented.

20. The current efforts to establish such a system-wide policy and strategy are aimed at creating an enabling environment in which gender mainstreaming can be further enhanced. These system-wide efforts are not a substitute for agency-specific actions on gender equality and empowerment of women. Over the years many United Nations entities have developed noteworthy areas of expertise that have contributed significantly to the stock of knowledge and understanding of how to address gender equality and empowerment of women. Such expertise continues to be needed as peace and development processes become more complex and gender gaps persist.

21. In pursuit of gender goals, United Nations entities will continue to apply a two-track approach by making efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women. A major weakness in the implementation to date of gender mainstreaming as a strategy is the perception that women-specific interventions are not necessary. Neither is a substitute for the other, however; both approaches are complementary and mutually reinforcing. The systemic nature of discrimination against women and the persistence of gender inequality require a combined approach that creates opportunities for women, promotes their rights and secures their well-being, while also seeking to change the cultural and social norms that sustain gender inequalities.

VI. Elements of the United Nations system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming

22. Both the policy and strategy will be based on the above-mentioned definition of gender mainstreaming contained in the agreed conclusions 1997/2. The elements listed below were agreed at the 2006 meeting of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and endorsed by the High Level Committees on Management and on Programme of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

A. Elements of a system-wide policy on gender mainstreaming

23. The system-wide policy would provide a framework for an integrated and coordinated action by the United Nations system to increase the effectiveness of the United Nations to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, with emphasis on the country level.

24. The policy would take into account existing gender-mainstreaming policies, strategies and action plans of individual United Nations entities and further reinforce their implementation.

25. The policy would articulate strengthened commitments of senior management to effectively and efficiently implement the gender-mainstreaming strategy and allocate sufficient resources.

26. The policy would stress enhanced coherence and collaboration among United Nations entities and contribute to the United Nations reform process.

27. The policy would measure progress at country and system-wide levels.

28. Assessments carried out jointly and individually by different United Nations entities at global, regional, national and local levels on challenges, needs and priorities would inform the policy.

29. The policy would rely on a multiplicity of approaches, including specific interventions aimed at women's empowerment and full enjoyment of their human rights, partnership with men, as well as programme approaches to integrate a gender perspective.

30. The policy would make gender analysis an essential tool for sectoral policy and programme interventions.

B. Elements of the system-wide strategy on gender mainstreaming

Accountability

31. The strategy would address the responsibility for gender mainstreaming and accountability of all staff and, in particular, heads of United Nations entities and senior management, including a clear system-wide understanding of accountability, based on common-system standards, targets and measures of gender-mainstreaming performance (human resources management policies, performance management system, gender sensitization training, etc.).

Results-based management

32. The strategy would be results-oriented in order to track efforts of the United Nations system in bridging the gap between policy and implementation. Relevant indicators and benchmarks or results statements, complementary to effective accountability, would be developed to measure how far gender-mainstreaming goals are met and to link results to resources. Most United Nations entities have already adopted results-based management.

Monitoring and evaluation

33. In order to effectively implement gender-mainstreaming policy, relevant mechanisms for reporting, monitoring and evaluation would be harmonized. These mechanisms would be introduced at the policy, planning and decision-making stages, and be implemented in the follow-up and evaluation of programmes and projects.

Allocation of resources

34. The allocation of sufficient and secure resources, including human and financial resources for the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming is a vital aspect of the implementation of the United Nations system-wide policy on gender mainstreaming. For too long, gender-mainstreaming activities have been seen as an add-on responsibility to intergovernmental mandates that are expected to be met within existing budgetary resources. Experience has shown that this is an unrealistic expectation. As opportunities for gender mainstreaming arise and Member States avail themselves more regularly of support from the United Nations system, gender-mainstreaming activities must be funded securely and commensurately.

Capacity-building

35. A system-wide strategy would encompass capacity-building in gender mainstreaming, including mandatory training with periodic follow-up and incorporating gender mainstreaming in other training activities, such as management and leadership, as well as capacity-building in technical areas. The strategy would aim at strengthening technical skills in areas of policy analysis, programme development, planning, results-based management, including through existing training centres, such as, for example, the United Nations Staff College. It would also address knowledge management and sharing, including the development and system-wide dissemination of good practices and analytical techniques and tools necessary for the development of policies, such as, for example, statistics and research, surveys, forecasts and cost-benefit analyses, checklists, guidelines, gender impact assessment methods, measurements, monitoring and evaluation.

Coherence and coordination

36. It would be fundamental to have greater coherence and coordination among all organizations of the United Nations system and with partner Governments in the gender-mainstreaming strategy. It would be especially important to have stronger linkages between normative activity and actual practice at the country level. Not only must actions be coordinated, both in the field and at Headquarters, but policies, programming and delivery approaches, and evaluation standards should also be coherent and harmonized. The system-wide strategy would build on comparative advantages of resident officials (resident coordinators, resident representatives, humanitarian coordinators, special representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General). The strategy would also enhance implementation of joint efforts to support national and regional women's machineries in gender mainstreaming.

Joint programming

37. A system-wide strategy would provide options for joint global, regional and country programming, including ways to conduct joint assessment missions, pool resources and technical assistance; share methodologies, good practices and identify thematic clusters, and so on. Joint programming of selected thematic areas as well as joint technical assistance and assessment missions, including with bilateral partners,[9] are essential for demonstrating a focus on results at the country level.

VII. Next steps

38. Further developing the policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming requires an in-depth analysis of capacities, strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations system in carrying out mandates for gender equality and empowerment of women as well as coherence in implementing them. The Secretary-General looks forward to studying the findings of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence as to how the United Nations can work better to achieve gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming.

39. In its resolution 2005/31, the Economic and Social Council called upon all entities of the United Nations system, including United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, to intensify efforts to address the challenges to the integration of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes. The Secretary-General intends to carry out a detailed review of the capacity of the United Nations system on gender mainstreaming. The review will assess the current policies, action plans and methodologies of individual United Nations entities for gender mainstreaming, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations system in gender mainstreaming. It will build on the findings of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence and will provide an opportunity to further study particular questions or issues that may be identified by the Panel.

40. Both processes will contribute to understanding better and operationalizing the elements of the policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming discussed above. They will help determine how best to bridge policy and institutional gaps, and adjust the current coordination mechanisms on gender mainstreaming to ensure better coherence both at headquarters and in the field. At the country level, special attention will be paid to creating greater synergies in the United Nations system by further developing the gender-mainstreaming capacity of the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes.

VIII. Conclusion

41. **Achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is central to realizing the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as in the pursuit of peace, human rights, and poverty alleviation. The ongoing dialogue on the system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming, including in the Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its subsidiary bodies, in the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the United Nations Development Group, demonstrates the commitment of the United Nations**

system to gender mainstreaming. Working in various sectors and areas within their mandates, United Nations entities have made significant progress in supporting the efforts of Member States to attain gender equality.

42. The Secretary-General is fully committed to the goal of gender equality, and places great importance on the role of senior managers in creating an environment that actively supports gender mainstreaming. This element will form part of his "compact" with senior officials, where their management goals are set.

43. More needs to be done to enhance gender mainstreaming in all programmes and policies, to ensure coherence and coordination across the system, increase accountability and ownership for implementation and to create robust institutional structures and organizational cultures that are supportive of gender mainstreaming. This is necessary to build synergy among the various mandates and sectors of the United Nations system. The gaps that have already been identified should be addressed. Foremost among them is the need for an overarching system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming.

44. The system-wide policy and strategy will enhance coherence, integration of a gender perspective and clarity of actions in the United Nations system to support gender equality and empowerment of women. They will also strengthen the linkages between the normative and analytical work of the United Nations system and its operational activities by contributing to increased collaboration, improved coordination and more complementary actions by United Nations entities at the operational level in response to the decisions of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. Furthermore, this approach has the potential to enhance the efficiency and effective utilization of scarce resources.

45. In so doing, the United Nations as a system can become a more strategic partner to national actors, strengthening their capacities and ensuring that the comparative strengths of government and civil society are used to maximum advantage. The United Nations system-wide policy and strategy on gender mainstreaming is an important contribution in that direction.

Notes

[1] See General Assembly resolution 60/1, paras. 58, 59 and 166.

[2] See A/60/430, para. 39.

[3] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution I, annex I, para. 38.

[4] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 3 and addendum* (A/52/3/Rev.1 and Rev.1/Add.1), chap. IV, para. 4.

[5] See General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 169.

[6] See A/60/733, para. 130.

[7] Ibid., para. 131.

[8] See ACC/1998/4, para. 63.

[9] See the report of the Joint Meeting of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Network of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, April 2006.